

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 /074 W
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R 191806Z AUG 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6625
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL PALERMO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IT, GW
SUBJECT: ITALIAN REACTION TO THE KAPPLER ESCAPE

REF: ROME 13366

SUMMARY. THE KAPPLER ESCAPE CONTINUES TO DOMINATE ALL NEWS COVERAGE IN ITALY. THE DEFENSE COMMITTEES OF BOTH THE SENATE AND THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES WILL HOLD HEARING ON THE CASE NEXT WEEK. RESENTMENT AGAINST THE WEST GERMAN GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST THE KAPPLERS IS WIDESPREAD AND THE SEARCH FOR A SCAPEGOAT CONTINUES. BOTH REPUBLICANS AND SOCIALISTS HAVE EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S EXPLANATION OF THE INCIDENT AND HAVE CALLED FOR THE RESIGNATION OF DEFENSE MINISTER LATTANZIO.
END SUMMARY.

1. THE ESCAPE OF FORMER SS COLONEL HERBERT KAPPLER
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FROM A MILITARY HOSPITAL NEAR ROME ON AUGUST 14 (SEE REFTEL) CONTINUES TO DOMINATE NEWS COVERAGE IN ALL ITALIAN MEDIA. RESENTMENT AGAINST THE WEST GERMAN GOVERNMENT FOR ITS FAILURE TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST THE KAPPLERS RUNS HIGH, AND MOST COMMENTATORS FEEL THAT PROSPECTS FOR THE ESCAPED WAR CRIMINAL'S EXTRADITION ARE EXTREMELY SLIM. SPECULATION PERSISTS AS TO THE

POSSIBLE INVOLVEMENT OF WEST GERMAN "SECRET SERVICES" IN THE ESCAPE PLOT, AND MOST NEWSPAPERS AGREE THAT MRS. KAPPLER MUST HAVE HAD ACCOMPLICES WHO HELPED HER PLAN AND CARRY OUT THE ESCAPE. TWO CARABINIERI WHO WERE ON DUTY AT THE ROME MILITARY HOSPITAL ON AUGUST 14 HAVE BEEN DETAINED AND CHARGED WITH DERELICTION OF DUTY, AND FURTHER ARRESTS AND DISCIPLINARY ACTION ARE EXPECTED AMONG THE HOSPITAL GUARD FORCE. THE DEFENSE COMMITTEES OF THE SENATE AND CHAMBER WILL MEET IN EXTRAORDINARY SESSIONS ON AUGUST 23 AND 25 RESPECTIVELY TO BEGIN THEIR INQUIRIES INTO THE INCIDENT.

2. THOUGH THE DC AND ALL OF THE ABSTAINING PARTIES HAVE CONDEMNED THE ESCAPE AND CALLED FOR KAPPLER'S IMMEDIATE RETURN TO ITALY, THE STRONGEST REACTIONS HAVE COME FROM THE PRI AND PSI. BOTH HAVE EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION WITH THE OFFICIAL ACCOUNT OF THE INCIDENT AND CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ASSUME "POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY" FOR KAPPLER'S ESCAPE. THE REPUBLICANS HAVE CALLED REPEATEDLY FOR THE RESIGNATION OF DEFENSE MINISTER VITO LATTANZIO. SOME SOCIALIST LEADERS (NOTABLY EX-PARTY SECRETARY GIOCOMO MANCINI AND DEPUTY PARTY SECRETARY ENRICO MANCA) HAVE CAUTIONED AGAINST OVERREACTION, BUT ON AUGUST 18 TWO PSI DEPUTIES, MARIO FERRI AND ALFREDO GIOVANARDI, CALLED FOR THE RESIGNATION OF LATTANZIO AND INTERIOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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MINISTER COSSIGA, AND REQUESTED THE IMMEDIATE SUSPENSION OF THE COMMANDER OF THE CARABINIERE, THE COMMANDER OF THE NATIONAL POLICE, AND THE CHIEFS OF THE TWO SECURITY SERVICES.

3. COMMENT: EMBASSY DEFENSE ATTACHE REPORTS THAT A NUMBER OF HIS CONTACTS IN THE MILITARY ARE DEMORALIZED BY THE ESCAPE AND FEEL THAT LATTANZIO WILL EVENTUALLY BE FORCED TO RESIGN. HOWEVER, WHILE THE KAPPLER INCIDENT IS CERTAINLY AN EMBARRASSMENT FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND THE MILITARY, SUCH FAR-REACHING POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS WOULD APPEAR UNLIKELY. THE PCI HAS NOT CRITICIZED THE DEFENSE MINISTER DIRECTLY, AND HE HAS LONG BEEN A CLOSE ASSOCIATE OF PRIME MINISTER ANDREOTTI. AT PRESENT IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT THE COMMUNISTS WOULD INSIST ON HIS REMOVAL OR THAT ATTACKS BY THE SMALLER PARTIES COULD FORCE HIM TO RESIGN.
HOLMES

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Sent Date: 19-Aug-1977 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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